



# ANNUAL REPORT

# 2020



**bluffton**  
HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY™



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# MAYOR LISA SULKA



Plan your work for today and every day, work your plan.

That quote is from former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and is a fitting mantra of the Town amidst this year's global pandemic, challenging economy and fluctuating economic variables.

I am proud to present to you this year's annual report in a year unlike any other. Let me assure you, the business of the Town continued unabated as we negotiated changes to our workplace and the way we do business.

The good news is the Town remained on schedule and accomplished numerous projects such as the new Wright Family Park, the Calhoun Street Regional Dock, the Martin Family Park and additional sewer projects for neighborhoods without pre-planned infrastructure.

Additionally, the Town established a free membership program for any business in Bluffton to help navigate the obstacles of the pandemic via the Don Ryan Center for Innovation, the Town's economic development arm.

As an overview to the annual report, Town Council remains committed to a robust capital improvement project schedule (i.e. parks, sewer, sidewalks, streetscapes, etc.), protecting the health of the May River and our natural resources, promoting a pro-business culture through the Don Ryan Center for Innovation and exploring innovative ways to partner with developers to increase the inventory of affordable/workforce housing in our Town. Please peruse the report for a better understanding of the Town's body of work this year.

On behalf of Town Council, we are excited about Bluffton's progress and we are honored to serve you. Together with you, I share a deep, heartfelt pride in our community. This pride is reflected in each project the Town completes. We are extremely proud of Bluffton's perseverance and community spirit, this year and always.



# TOWN MANAGER MARC ORLANDO

It is my pleasure to present the Town of Bluffton's 2020 Annual Report, which highlights another year of accomplishments for the residents of Bluffton.

Every year the Town team has a robust workload and this year, with the added responsibilities and challenges of the COVID-19 global pandemic, I remain very proud of every member of Town staff. The daily business of the Town continued unabated despite juggling a shift of workplaces, new protocols, modified processes and additional workloads due to responding to the fluctuating needs of our community.

The 2020 Annual Report is a presentation of completed project, policies and operational achievements for the past year based on the priorities outlined in the Strategic Plan. I am proud of the Town's accomplishments and the resiliency of Town staff and residents, especially this year, as we remain undeterred amidst the challenges of a global pandemic.



In Fiscal Year 2021, the Town adopted a \$34.2 million consolidated budget to meet the emerging programmatic, amenities and infrastructure needs of our ever-growing community even during a global pandemic. The Town's robust Capital Improvement Program includes installing infrastructure within the Town's earliest neighborhoods which did not have the benefit of pre-planned sewers, sidewalks and lighting.

The Town's portfolio of open spaces and parks greatly expanded this year with the completion of the Buckwalter Place Park and Bluffton's Veterans Memorial, the Martin Family Park on Boundary Street and the Wright Family Park/Calhoun Street Regional Dock, which offers public access to our beautiful May River. The Town has also begun planning for the New Riverside Park, known for its iconic Red Barn, for a future park in one of Bluffton's fastest-growing areas.

Additionally, The Don Ryan Center for Innovation moved into its permanent 3,000 square-foot facility in Buckwalter Place and offers co-working space for our region's innovators. The Town continues to experience significant growth and I remain grateful for the leadership of the Town Council, the outstanding work of our Town employees, and guidance from appointed Board, Commission, and Committee members. I also thank our residents whose deep pride in our community inspires us daily.

# TOWN COUNCIL



Pictured left to right: Councilwoman Bridgette Frazier, Councilman Larry Toomer, Mayor Lisa Sulka, Mayor Pro-Tempore Fred Hamilton and Councilman Dan Wood

## TOWN OF BLUFFTON

Incorporated in 1852, the Town of Bluffton proudly serves a diverse community of more than 27,000 residents in all facets of life, work and recreation. Each day, a devoted workforce of approximately 150 people come together to ensure the needs of the community are met through municipal service. To guide this effort, the Town of Bluffton Town Council adopted the following vision and mission statements to help guide policy decisions.

### VISION

*Bluffton, the Heart of the Lowcountry, a Town that appreciates the past, focuses on today and is planning together for a greater future.*

### MISSION

*We take care of our citizens, the Town and each other by continuously making our community and organization better.*

# STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS



MAY RIVER AND SURROUNDING  
RIVERS AND WATERSHEDS



AFFORDABLE AND/OR  
WORKFORCE HOUSING



COMMUNITY QUALITY OF LIFE



ECONOMIC GROWTH



FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY



INFRASTRUCTURE



TOWN ORGANIZATION



# DON RYAN CENTER FOR INNOVATION



## THE HUB

The Don Ryan Center for Innovation moved into its new home, the HUB at Buckwalter, in 2020. It is an exciting new space to meet the growing needs of our innovators and the business community. This flex space allows the Don Ryan Center to expand its networking events and opportunities for members, accelerating the creation of entrepreneurial ventures, knowledge-based jobs and innovative business solutions.

## BUSINESS NAVIGATION DURING COVID-19

- FREE memberships
- Business resiliency resource guide
- Business resiliency support request/Small Business Concierge
- FREE access to The HUB to help area businesses (when open to public)
- Execution of the Town of Bluffton's Small Business Economic Resiliency Plan

## EXPANSION OF PROGRAMS

- Upgraded START-UP program to offer additional organized structure
- Launched GROWTH program to support existing businesses
- Expanded Membership

## TECHNOLOGY IMPLEMENTATION

- Launch of new website with integration of 3rd party software
  - Member portal/facility management software
  - HubSpot software for Customer Relationship Management (CRM)
  - BaseCamp Project Management Software
- Outsource marketing vendor to assist in development of marketing plan/communications

# DON RYAN CENTER FOR INNOVATION

## BY THE NUMBERS



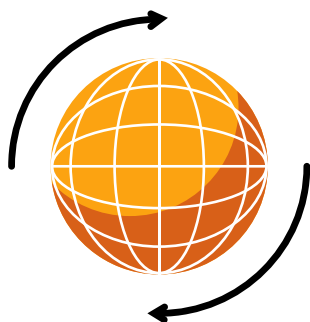
360

### MEMBERS YTD

"Resiliency Members" -- signed up for FREE members

474

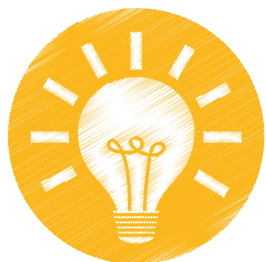
### TOTAL MEMBERS



19/2

### VIRTUAL EVENTS/IN PERSON EVENTS

Total attendance -- 743



53

### SMALL BUSINESS CONCIERGE

Small business customers helped with initial call, research, emails and possible mentor assignment

# ENGINEERING



Calhoun Street Regional Dock



Buck Island-Simmons ville Phase 5 Sidewalks



Wright Family Park

## CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

### COMPLETED

- Martin Family Park
- Wright Family Park
- Calhoun Street Regional Dock
- 184 Bluffton Road parking area
- The HUB at Buckwalter/Don Ryan Center for Innovation
- Buckwalter Place Park and Veterans Memorial
- Town Hall improvements to include Ulmer Auditorium
- Buck Island-Simmons ville Phase 5E Sewer
- Buck Island-Simmons ville Phase 5 Sidewalks
- Garvin-Garvey House exhibits and signage
- Squire Pope Carriage House Preservation
- Construction documents and bidding for Law Enforcement Center Facility Improvements

### IN PROGRESS

- Planning and design for New Riverside Park/ Barn site
- Buck Island-Simmons ville Phase 5A-D Sewer
- Historic District Sanitary Sewer Extension Phase 1
- Jason-Able Streets Sanitary Sewer Project extension
- Construction documents, easement acquisition and permitting for the Goethe - Shults Neighborhood Improvements Phase 2



# ENGINEERING

## WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

- Continued implementation of May River Watershed Action Plan and Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Program.
- Awarded \$365,558.38 EPA Clean Water Act Section 319-grant by SC Department of Health and Environmental Control to eliminate septic systems and connect 49 homes to sanitary sewer
- Completed a draft Southern Lowcountry Regional Stormwater Ordinance and Design Manual based on watershed boundaries, instead of jurisdictional borders, in partnership with Beaufort County, Jasper County, Town of Port Royal, City of Beaufort, and City of Hardeeville
- Created the May River Story Map to inform and engage the public in the Town's efforts to protect and restore shellfish harvesting in the May River
- Presented the Town's watershed management work at the National StormCon Conference, the National Watershed and Stormwater Conference, the regional Southeast Stormwater Association Conference, and the SC Association of Stormwater Managers meeting



MST Sampling



Flow monitoring

# ENGINEERING

## WATERSHED MANAGEMENT BY THE NUMBERS



1,517

### CONSTRUCTION SITE INSPECTIONS

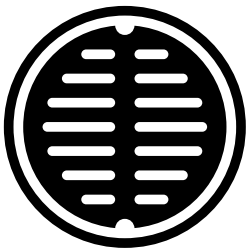
185 Notice of violation  
enforcement actions



75

### (MST) SAMPLES COLLECTED FROM MAY RIVER

Follow up septic tank effluent  
inspections performed



45

### ILLICIT DISCHARGE AND DETECTION INVESTIGATIONS

8 Notice of violations  
6 Notice of violation  
enforcement actions



120

### STORMWATER PLANS REVIEWED

# ENGINEERING

## PUBLIC WORKS

- Successfully completed two drainage improvement projects located on Green Street and the Dubois Retention Pond
- Assumed maintenance responsibility for Martin Family Park, Buckwalter Place Park and Veterans Memorial and New Riverside Park/Barn site
- Assumed maintenance of Mellichamp Drive, May River Road and Buckwalter Place Blvd.
- Developed 5-year strategic plan
- Assumed responsibility for all special events and facility rentals.
- Technology upgrades

## BY THE NUMBERS



6,617

### MAINTENANCE MAN HOURS

Town of Bluffton parks



5,452

### MAINTENANCE MAN HOURS

Town of Bluffton facilities



5,072

### MAINTENANCE MAN HOURS

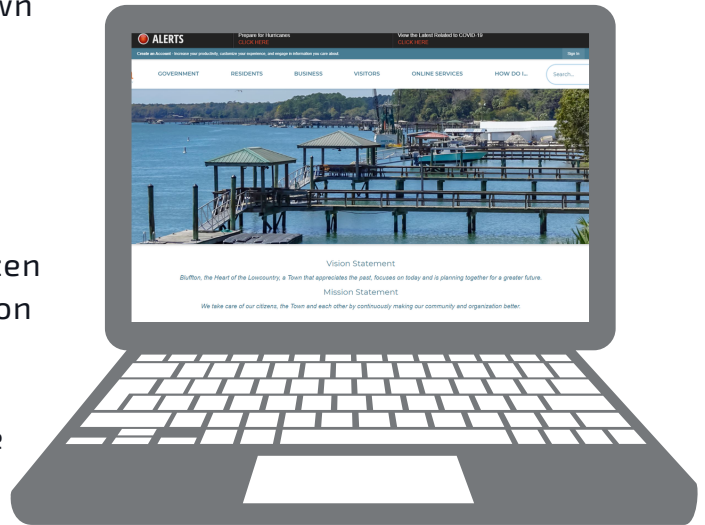
Town of Bluffton roads



# EXECUTIVE

## INVESTMENTS IN COMMUNICATION

- Successfully launched newly designed Town of Bluffton website
  - Implements components of Town Council's strategic plan and budget priorities
  - Investment in technologies which enhance the Town's transparency, citizen engagement opportunities and operation efficiencies
  - Designed to be more streamlined
  - Delivers a more customized experience for residents



## STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

- Town of Bluffton Strategic Plan FY 2021-2022 approved by Town Council with accompanying work plan to accomplish priorities
- Town of Bluffton Social Media Strategy for Town of Bluffton and Bluffton Police Department drafted and implemented

## TRANSPARENCY

- Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Requests
  - 241 submitted/completed

## AWARDS, ACHIEVEMENTS & ACCOLADES

- #8, The South's Best Small Towns -- Southern Living Magazine, April 2019
- #1 "Safest City" in South Carolina -- Safety.com, December 2020
- #4 "Safest City" in South Carolina -- Safewise, May 2020
- #1 "Safest City" in South Carolina -- The Home Security Advisor, 2019
- #2 "Safest City" In South Carolina -- National Council for Home Safety & Security, April 2019
- #2 "Safest City" In South Carolina -- National Council for Home Safety & Security, March 2020
- #4 "Safest City" in South Carolina -- HomeSnacks, 2019

# EXECUTIVE

## SOCIAL MEDIA BY THE NUMBERS

FACEBOOK



16%



TOTAL NUMBER  
OF LIKES

INSTAGRAM



62%



TOTAL NUMBER  
OF FOLLOWERS

TWITTER



23.5%



TOTAL NUMBER  
OF FOLLOWERS

LINKEDIN



88%



TOTAL NUMBER  
OF FOLLOWERS

YOUTUBE



68%



TOTAL NUMBER  
OF SUBSCRIBERS

## MEDIA RELEASES BY THE NUMBERS



72

TOTAL MEDIA RELEASES

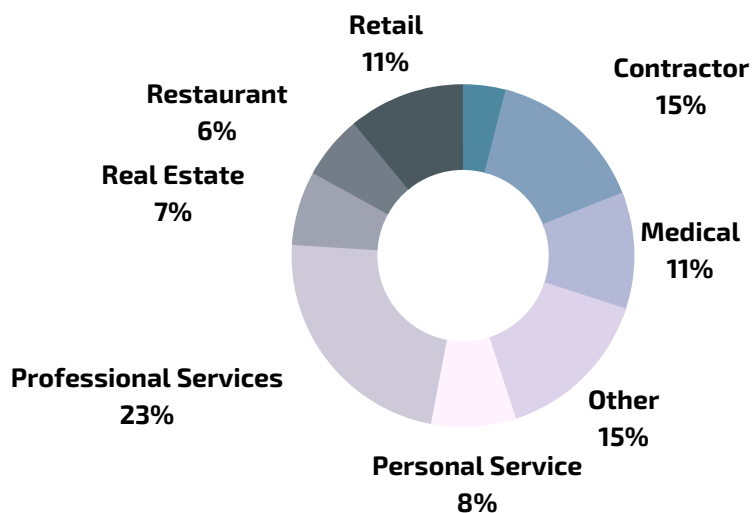
# FINANCE/ADMINISTRATION

## FINANCE

- Town received an unqualified audit opinion for the FY 2019 Financial Statement reports
  - The "clean opinion" is the most confident response provided by independent audit firms to users that the financial statements present a fair representation of the entity's financial position and are free of material misstatements
  - Town is in sound financial condition with the growth in the tax base in recent years, supported by written financial policies council adopted, and its professional management
- The Town successfully refinanced the current General Obligation (GO) Bonds on March 2, 2020 as approved by Town Council per recommendation from our bond counsel and financial advisor resulting in a net annual savings of \$59,000
- Aa1 Municipal Bond Rating issued by Moody's and AA+ Municipal Bond Rating issued by Standard & Poor's

## BUSINESS LICENSE

- As part of the Small Business Resiliency Plan, Town Council deferred the business license renewal deadline from April 30 to August 7
- Town accepts state-wide uniform business license application form instituted by the Municipal Association of South Carolina
  - Adopted the Model Ordinance effective January 1, 2019
- Industries within the Town include:





# FINANCE/ADMINISTRATION

## BY THE NUMBERS FISCAL YEAR 2021 BUDGET SNAPSHOT



**\$34,223,867**

### CONSOLIDATED BUDGET

- General Fund -- \$19,363,015
- Stormwater Utility Fund -- \$2,043,817
- Capital Improvements Program Fund -- \$9,185,407
- Debt Service Fund -- \$3,631,628



**3**

### POSITIONS ADDED TOWN-WIDE

- Director of Emergency Management
- 2 Police Officers -- grant dependent



**2**

### NEW REVENUE SOURCES

- General Fund -- Vehicle Tag Fee to offset Town-owned road maintenance expenses
- Stormwater -- National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Plan Review and Inspections



**\$34,223,867**

### TOTAL REVENUES

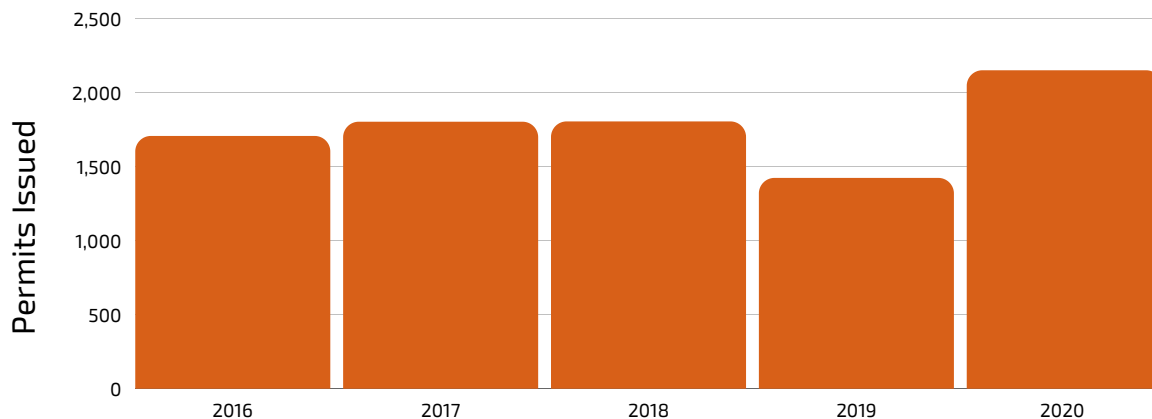
**\$34,223,510**

### TOTAL EXPENDITURES

# GROWTH MANAGEMENT

## NEW DEVELOPMENT

- 2,146 total permits issued -- value of \$413,517,142
  - Permits include: remodels, irrigations, additions, new homes, new garages, new commercial buildings, etc.
    - Single-family/multi-family
      - 818 permits -- value of \$336,107,347
    - Commercial
      - 28 permits -- New
      - 46 permits -- Remodel
      - Construction of 304,868 square feet of new commercial space
- 118 -- development applications received



## AFFORDABLE HOUSING COMMITTEE

- Town is in negotiations to construct a maximum number of 82 units on three of four Town-owned properties

## NEIGHBORHOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

- 23 low-to-moderate income households assisted -- value of \$34,498.70
  - Household repairs to ensure residence is "safe and dry"
    - Income qualifying households assistance
      - Repairs to leaking roof
      - Broken windows
      - Unstable floors
      - Septic tank pumping assistance
      - Removal of unsafe structures and/or bulk items
      - Assistance with sewer connections
      - Road repairs

# GROWTH MANAGEMENT

## GENERAL CODE/UNIFIED DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE (UDO) AMENDMENTS

- Adoption of amendments
  - Increasing percentage of affordable/workforce housing to be provided in new Planned Unit Developments (PDU) from 10% to 20%
  - Improved construction site maintenance and preparation for severe weather events
  - Allowance of storefront manufacturing uses
    - Example -- Coffee shop that also roasts coffee beans to package for retail sale
  - Small cell wireless facilities ordinance to allow placement on poles/other structures in right-of-way for improvement internet access

## PRESERVING HISTORIC BLUFFTON

- Phase 1 installation of exhibits at Garvin-Garvey House at Oyster Factory Park
  - Exhibit showcases life of Cyrus Garvin; freedman who built house in 1870
    - Garvin-Garvey House is only house still standing along the May River previously owned by a formerly enslaved person
    - Garvin-Garvey House rehabilitation was completed in June 2017
- Adoption of preservation plan for Squire Pope Carriage House in November 2019
  - Built circa 1850
  - Located at Wright Family Park
  - Priority is stabilization, establishment of new foundation prior to conducting rehabilitation work to allow for future use of structure



# HUMAN RESOURCES

## STAFF SUPPORT

- Organized financial freedom class for employees and their families
- Collaborated with e3 to review employee's current benefits, understanding of benefits
- Supported staff with hosting a Black History month luncheon in February for employees
- Organized employee luncheons to celebrate milestone anniversaries and birthdays
- Recognized Star Award Winners also known as the employee of the month as voted on by peers
- Established Employee Newsletter

## COVID-19 COMMUNICATIONS

- Created a telecommuting policy to be utilized during and post pandemic
- Created emergency pandemic-related policies and updated Employee Handbook
- Communicated to staff about COVID-19 related policies, laws and protocols
- Facilitated Employee Task Force to navigate COVID-19 re-entry plan and training guide

## BY THE NUMBERS



31

### NEW HIRES

Including 12 student interns



147

### TOTAL EMPLOYEES

Including 14 part-time employees

# INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

## TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT DIVISION

- Energov enterprise update
  - Updated to newest software to better serve public
  - Software utilized by Customer Service, Building Inspection, Planning, Business License and Public Works
    - Plans, Permits, inspections, licenses and special events
- Information technology support during pandemic
  - Remote work access set up for staff to secure internet connections
  - Remote access set up for staff to support all functions of Town day-to-day operations
- CSS Portal (Citizens Self Service Portal)
  - Upgraded to newest software
  - Gives citizens, contractors, vendors, etc. the ability to submit plans, permits and inspection requests electronically
  - Provides more efficient customer service and expedites initial processes
  - Includes an invoice payment portal for citizens and contractors to utilize

## GRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS (GIS) DIVISION

- Map Gallery
  - Overhaul of map gallery to provide easier user experience, as well as detail
- May River StoryMap
  - Dashboard featuring interactive data, as well as monitoring stations along the May River
  - Updated through the Watershed Management Division
- Capital Project Dashboard
  - Interactive story-map of current Capital Improvement Projects within Town limits
  - Updated through the Engineering Division
- Helping Agencies Providing Assistance StoryMap
  - Interactive map that offers citizens information about local non-profits and resources offering assistance during pandemic



# MUNICIPAL COURT

## WORKFLOW

- Entered into contract with the 14th Circuit Public Defenders Office for indigent defendant services
- Beaufort County Clerk of Court's Office assumes appointment of council to defendants to alleviate the stress of processing the applications in house
- Facilitated workflow for non-traditional court process during COVID-19 to reopen sooner than other courts in the state of South Carolina to process cases
  - Streamlined court process offering video/conferencing in lieu of in-person hearings for safety of defendants and victims
- Defendants offered opportunity to complete community service in lieu of payment to reduce financial hardships

## BY THE NUMBERS



2,474

**TOTAL TICKETS ISSUED**



2,083

**TOTAL TRAFFIC TICKETS CLOSED**



218

**TOTAL CRIMINAL CASES COMPLETED**



216

**TOTAL WARRANTS ISSUED**

# POLICE DEPARTMENT

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- Bluffton Community Soup Kitchen food distribution
- Cookout with Cops
- Explorer Program
- Reverse Trunk-Or-Treat (officers dressed up and handed out candy in community)
- Town of Bluffton Toy Drive
- Reverse Shop with a Cop (officers delivered toys to identified children in need)
- Saturday bagged lunch distribution via local churches
- Police Easter egg hunt (children colored eggs, hung in windows for officers to find)
- Story time with local first responders
- Juneteenth
- Lutzie 43

## COMMAND CHANGE

- Stephenie Price appointed Chief of Police
  - Sworn in by Town Manager Marc Orlando on October 12, 2020

## BY THE NUMBERS



54

**SWORN OFFICERS**

10

**CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES**

8

**CHAPLAINS**

8

**VOLUNTEERS**

1

**RESERVE OFFICER**

# POLICE DEPARTMENT

## BY THE NUMBERS



89,755

CALLS FOR SERVICE

0

HOMICIDE

39

BURGLARY/  
BREAKING &  
ENTERING

1,122

TRAFFIC  
COLLISIONS

2

FORCIBLE  
RAPE

149

LARCENY/  
THEFT

6,322

TRAFFIC  
CITATIONS

2

ROBBERY

202

DRUG  
VIOLATIONS

96

DUI

12

AGGRAVATED  
ASSAULT

2

K9 DEPLOYMENT

859

SPEEDING  
CITATIONS

# POLICE DEPARTMENT

## SOCIAL MEDIA BY THE NUMBERS

### FACEBOOK



19,064

TOTAL NUMBER  
OF LIKES

### INSTAGRAM



3,121

TOTAL NUMBER  
OF FOLLOWERS

### YOUTUBE



39

SUBSCRIBERS

### TWITTER



1,637

TOTAL NUMBER  
OF FOLLOWERS

## MEDIA RELEASES BY THE NUMBERS



24

TOTAL MEDIA RELEASES

# COVID-19 RESPONSE

## SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITY

- Providing up-to-date information as it relates to the pandemic in Bluffton, Beaufort County, South Carolina and nationally
- Blue ribbons on Town property to show support for first responders and healthcare workers
- Virtual Chalk Your Walk on social media to engage the public
- Old Town 4-way stop banners celebrating Class of 2020
- Virtual historic preservation education
- Bi-weekly live Facebook updates from the Mayor, Town Manager and Chief of Police
- Police Easter egg hunt (children colored eggs, hung in windows for officers to find)
- Story time with local first responders
- Business license tax renewal extension
- Virtual public meetings streamed on Town's Facebook page
- Virtual Municipal Court sessions
- Small Business Resiliency Plan
- FREE membership with Don Ryan Center for Innovation for 1 year
- Emergency Ordinance for face coverings



## INTERNAL RESPONSE

- Immediate implementation of telecommuting among staff
- Creation of telecommuting policy to be utilized during and post pandemic
- Creation of emergency pandemic-related policies and updated Employee Handbook
- Communication to staff about COVID-19 related policies, laws and protocols
- Creation of Employee Task Force to navigate COVID-19 re-entry plan and training guide
- Additional cleaning at Town facilities by staff and hired cleaning contractor



# CONNECT WITH US

## FACEBOOK



**Town of Bluffton Government  
Bluffton Police Department  
Don Ryan Center for Innovation**

## LINKEDIN



**Town of Bluffton, SC  
Don Ryan Center for Innovation**

## INSTAGRAM



**TownofBluffton  
BlufftonPolice  
DonRyanCenter**

## YOUTUBE



**Town of Bluffton, SC Government  
Bluffton Police Department  
Don Ryan Center for Innovation**

## TWITTER



**@TownofBluffton  
@BlufftonPolice**

## NEXTDOOR



**Town of Bluffton  
Bluffton Police Department**

### **Town Manager**

Marc Orlando, ICMA-CM  
MOrlando@townofbluffton.com

### **Director of Engineering**

Bryan McIlwee, P.E.  
BMcilwee@townofbluffton.com

### **Chief Technology Officer**

Tommy Sunday, CGCIO  
TSunday@townofbluffton.com

### **Deputy Town Manager**

Scott Marshall, MPA, ICMA-CM  
SMarshall@townofbluffton.com

### **Director of Growth Management**

Heather Colin, AICP  
HColin@townofbluffton.com

### **Clerk of Municipal Court**

Lisa Cunningham  
LCunningham@townofbluffton.com

### **Town Clerk**

Kimberly Chapman  
KChapman@townofbluffton.com

### **Director of Finance/Administration**

Chris Forster, MPA, CPFO, CGFM  
CFoster@townofbluffton.com

### **CEO, Don Ryan Center for Innovation**

Mike Levine  
MLevine@townofbluffton.com

### **Town Attorney**

Terry Finger  
TFinger@townofbluffton.com

### **Director of Human Resources**

Katherine Robinson, SPHR, SHRM-SCP  
KRobinson@townofbluffton.com

### **Public Information Officer**

Debbie Szpanka  
DSzpanka@townofbluffton.com

### **Chief of Police**

Stephenie Price  
SPrice@townofbluffton.com



20 Bridge Street

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#LoveBlufftonSC